An Introduction to Reading - It’s a ‘Great Place’!

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Head of Economic & Cultural Development
Today’s Chat:

• A bit about Reading (and hands up if you think Reading is a renowned cultural destination?!)  
• Culture & Heritage – on the ‘up’  
• 2016 Year of Culture  
• Our 2050 City Vision  
• Making us a Great Place  
• ‘Royal’ Credentials
A Borough Profile

- Reading covers an area of approx. 40 km² with a population of approx. 160,000
- Urban area extends beyond Borough into neighbouring authorities - 300,000+ population
- 30% have degree level qualifications or above, but over 20% have no qualifications at all
- Third most ethnically diverse authority in South East outside London
- A strong economy and ‘capital’ of the Thames Valley (2nd most productive economy after London)
- Economically buoyant - over 3.7m sq ft of proposed office space planned within 500m from the newly revamped Reading Station.
- An ambitious but cash-strapped local authority!
The ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’
Culture & Heritage on the ‘up’

- A new aspirational Culture & Heritage Strategy - engagement on this generated huge enthusiasm and energy (though reinforced a view that Reading’s cultural offer was ‘under the radar’).
- ‘Reading International’ - ambitious 3 year visual arts programme led by the University and funded by ACE’s ‘Ambition for Excellence’ programme. Front-ended by Artangel’s ‘Inside: Artists and Writers in Reading Prison’. National and international profile.
- Will culminate in a major exhibition in the re-opened Abbey Ruins and the aspiration is for a legacy biennial Reading International ‘Festival’.
- The Abbey Revealed project funded by the HLF and the Council. Scheduled Monument and Grade 1 listed, including the Abbey Gate building. Conservation works, signage, interpretation and extensive engagement.
- Cornerstone of a ‘new’ Abbey Quarter.
And there’s more……

• HLF and University funded redevelopment of the Museum of English Rural Life – again extensive engagement and activity programme.

• Reading and MERL partnership working – including exploration of ‘digital’ potential and now joint NPO status from April 18.

• Institute of Heritage and Creativity established by the University – pulling together expertise from across the University and to bring it ‘off campus’ to impact on Reading’s development and the well-being of citizens.

• Refurbishment of South Street Arts Centre, a vibrant hub for original and eclectic work resonating across Reading’s diverse communities.

• An established Cultural Education Partnership.

• And now 3 NPOs across 4 organisations:
  - Culture Mix and Readipop.
And we shouldn’t forget......
Reading’s Year of Culture 2016

Our objectives:

• Raise ambition and capacity.
• Create a promotional platform.
• Celebrate and engage the town's diverse communities.
• Grow audiences.
• Improve reputation & perceptions of Reading.
• Creating a place of opportunity (skills and jobs).
• Private sector engagement – Reading UK lead on delivery
• Strong support from, and engagement with, local cultural organisations and networks.

• ‘Place-making’
And somehow we made it work!
Meanwhile.....Reading 2050 Vision

In parallel a 2050 Visioning process was in train.

Led by the private sector with key players Barton Willmore, Reading University and Reading UK.

Building impetus from ‘playful’ beginnings - engagement, workshops, academic rigour and consultation. Including as part of the Year of Culture:
Not Just Words!

- The project has benefitted from the academic capability of Reading University across its schools of the Built Environment, Architecture and the Henley Business School. Foresight and back-casting techniques used by Manchester and Cardiff in their 2050 visions have been used supplemented by a series of workshops attended by a wide range of representatives, including from the Council.

- Emergent Vision with a wide stakeholder base and endorsed but certainly not led or driven by the Council.
• Long-term and aspirational but following international best practice as a mechanism to shape, influence and to secure investment – from R&D to infrastructure (including digital and the IoT), public & private.

• Grounded in Reading’s distinctiveness and sense of ‘place’ with a remarkable concurrence on key themes across sectors and many different organisations.
The Vision

Reading UK 2050 Vision

“Reading will be an internationally recognised and economically successful city region. A city where low carbon living is the norm, and the built environment, technology and innovation have combined to create a dynamic, smart and sustainable city with a high quality of life and equal opportunities for all”
Underpinned By 3 Key Themes

By 2050 Reading will be renowned as:

1. A City of Rivers and Parks – recognising how water has shaped our history and development and celebrating a ‘hidden’ asset.

2. A City of Festivals and Culture – Building on the success of the iconic Reading Festival but weaving back into and across the City, celebrating our city’s heritage and bringing the city to life.

3. A Green Tech City – evolving from the established technological focus of our business base and the expertise of the University. Truly sustainable growth.

(Simple but powerful)
Meanwhile (2!)....

The Great Place Scheme was announced. A new joint funding initiative by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Arts Council England (ACE) and Historic England (HE). The aim of the Scheme is:

‘To put arts, culture and heritage at the heart of the local vision for 12 places across England, making a step change in the contribution of culture in those areas and embedding them in the places’ plans for the future. Four of these places will be rural. It will fund projects in areas where there is already a strong local partnership approach and a commitment to embed arts, culture and heritage as a core part of local plans, policies and strategies - cementing partnerships across the public, private and voluntary sectors’. 
A Strategic Shift from Projects to Place

The stated ambition of this pilot programme is to support local areas to:

• Inspire a vision of how culture can change your place;
• Connect culture with new partners to help change places for the better;
• Incorporate a vision for culture into ambitions for your place;
• Build and share learning.

Resonating hugely with 2050:

‘A City of Festivals and Culture’
Rationale and Process

- Funding available from £500k to £2m.
- Expression of interest submitted October 2016: ‘Reading-on-Thames – a place of festivals and waterways renowned and celebrated for cultural excellence.’
- Pitched for £560k - Reading is a relatively small urban area and lots already going on - tactical decision to not be greedy in the face of intense competition!
- Obviously we were ultimately successful with the full bid approved April 2017.
- One of only 16 nationally and the only successful ‘urban’ bid in the south-east.
Reading-on-Thames

Weaving all this together and building from what we have (remember those earlier slides?) to extend and deepen impact:

1. Strategic partnership building - to the ‘next level’.
2. Research and Evaluation grounded in Reading’s particular needs and engaging local people and communities (Dr Sally Lloyd-Evans will bring this to life shortly).
3. Cultural Outreach and Commissioning - broadening involvement in utilising cultural activities to deliver on desired social outcomes and directly impacting on well-being and equality.
4. Reading-on-Thames Festival.

(Truly networked arts and heritage and with great thanks for the ongoing strategic support of both HLF and ACE.)
And where are we up to?

- ‘Permission to start’ from the funders earlier this month.
- Lead partners actively developing work programmes: University, Reading UK and the Council (though loads of others will be involved!).
- Cultural Partnership revamped and reconfigured.
- Festival Director appointed - Anna Doyle (who is fab!).
- Cultural Development Officer appointed - Lara Stavrilou (who is equally fab!).

Above all

Ambitious for and Positive about our town
With ‘Royal’ Credentials

And no not our ‘almost a premiership’ football team

But our very own dead king!

Thank you.
GREAT PLACE: CULTURE, COMMUNITIES AND PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH READING

Dr Sally Lloyd-Evans
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COMMUNITIES IN 2050

- **Vibrant multi-cultural heritage** pivotal to community cohesion and future sustainability

- **Placemaking** - deprivation and challenges associated with increasing socio-economic inequality between communities

- **Innovation** through Great Place Scheme: embedding arts/culture at heart of ‘better and more cohesive place’

- **South Reading IMD** – 3 areas are bottom 5% in terms of ‘education, skills and training’.

- **‘Arts in health’ practice** for tackling social deprivation (NCVO, ICC) - community voices often absent
GREAT PLACE RESEARCH:
CULTURE, COMMUNITIES AND PARTICIPATION

• pilot new approaches that enable cultural and community groups to work together
• understanding role of diverse cultural and heritage practices in community placemaking
• explore how arts, culture and heritage contribute to meeting Reading’s social and economic objectives
• inclusive and engaged communities

• Our Project: South Reading

• research into ‘doing’ inclusive and citizen-led culture and heritage in practice to inform citizen-led cultural commissioning and service provision
• engage diverse communities
• multi-disciplinary and participatory approach
• evaluation – shared journeys
Setting the scene:
Human Development Report
2014: *sustaining human progress*

- Dickens ‘Tale of Two Cities’
- 2.2 billion in multidimensional poverty – working poverty
- Global Inequalities
- Disconnected urban communities (JRF, 2016)
- Health and well being central to sustainable development
Changing notions of development in 2015 – ‘social and emotional’ (WDR, 2015)

Our attachments to, and feelings about place and community (our connections/heritage) shapes other material outcomes
LOCALISM, PLACE MAKING AND VOICE

• 2012, Whitley, South Reading: £1 million - “making places better for families”

• Participation and Empowerment:
  • Big Local Partnership
  • Whitely Community Development Association and Community Cafe
  • University of Reading
‘Whitley Researchers’

• Participatory action research
  Partnership between UoR students; local schools; residents; Whitley Community Development Association (WCDA/Big Local)
• Employed local residents on living wage to undertake research with undergraduate students
• Team of around 15
• Whitley for Real with RBC
WHITLEY: place and identity

- Population of 12,000; 4400 households (youthful)
- No car – 30% households
- 30% no formal education
- Multiple Deprivation Index (most deprived 5% nationally for skills, education and training)
- Focus for planners, public services and police
- Declining youth and support services
- Stigmatised
- BUT wealth of community assets and opportunities
PLACE MAPPING
Supporting the Whitley community in becoming more mobile and connected is key to tackling the deprivation and social exclusion associated with the area, a new University of Reading report has found.

The report highlights the biggest barriers to people ‘getting around’ and suggests ways in which access to transport can be improved for all residents. These can then be targeted by project co-funders Whitley Big Local – an initiative supported by a £1m Big Lottery grant which enables local people to make big lasting changes to the neighbourhood over 10 years.

After training by University of Reading experts in participatory action research methods, over 12 students and Whitley residents surveyed 500 local people on their experience of travelling around town. They also interviewed organisations, and arranged five community events.

- 45% households had no car
- 70% shop in one local supermarket
- 72% faced transport barriers
- 34% travel to hospital/doctors at least once a month (health)
- 50% paid work (0 hrs contracts)
- People only travel to where they can get easily – isolation
- Everyday family practices largely within Whitley
- 80 of those with a car socialise weekly (60% without a car) – gendered
- Lack of locally based arts and heritage (Café museuem)
GREAT PLACES:
WCDA/WHITLEY RESEARCHERS

• **2018-2020**: Innovative ways of engaging, training and supporting communities and cultural organisations in co-creating research on heritage, place and culture

• Research on everyday lived experiences of ‘doing’ culture and impact on wellness

• Community-led platform for cultural commissioning with stakeholders

• Focus on generation

PHOTOS: WHITLEY COMMUNITY MUSEUM, WCDA
SO FAR?

Youth Focus

• ‘Young Researchers’ in John Madejski Academy (Reading Girls, WEC schools) funded by RBC’s Decent Neighbourhood’s Fund

• Creative methods/photography to explore home, school and community - future lives?

  • Wellness
  • Voice
  • Belonging and Connectedness
WELCOME HOME: YOUTH FUTURES
FIND OUT MORE:

• Take a look at the Participation Lab blog:

http://blogs.reading.ac.uk/participation-lab/